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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2023  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [EUN](#) [BO](#) [LG](#)  
SUBJECT: LATVIA CONCERNED ON DEVELOPMENTS IN BELARUS,  
SUPPORTIVE OF U.S.

REF: A) 06 RIGA 633 B) WASER/MOORE E-MAILS

Classified By: DCM Stuart Seldowitz. Reason: 1.4 (d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: Latvian officials are concerned by developments in the U.S. - Belarus bilateral relationship, believing that this represents a hardening of positions by Lukashenka. They are offering support for the U.S., including within the EU, although they did not succeed in getting a presidency statement expressing concern at developments. The Latvians are discussing their own policy on Belarus and our spat with the GOB is likely to be used by those who favor retaining a tough line with Belarus to try to win the internal debate. The Latvians are also offering to share more intelligence with us on Belarus. End summary.

12. (C) Pol/econ chief met March 19 with Edgars Skuja, MFA U/S for bilateral issues, on a range of issues. Skuja asked for an update on developments in US/Belarusian relations and to confirm that the GOB was demanding a reduction in staffing at US Embassy Minsk. Pol/econ chief updated Skuja on the situation. Skuja responded that it was clear that US sanctions against Balneftekhim were "personally worrying to Lukashenka." He assessed that these steps show we "are hitting close to the center of the regime" and the threatened reductions in staff are retaliatory. Skuja opined that it was a reminder that the regime can be "brutal" and often resorts to "Soviet and KGB style tactics." Skuja recalled Latvia's own problems with Belarus in July 2006, when a Latvian diplomat was expelled after being set up on charges of distributing pornography (ref a). Skuja said that there would be "an internal discussion" of Latvian policy on Belarus March 20 and that these developments would factor into the discussion. (Comment: Skuja appeared to suggest that our issues would be used by those in the discussion, like him, who favor keeping up the pressure on Minsk. End comment.)

13. (C) Skuja added that the GOL had supported an initiative to have the French make an EU demarche in Minsk urging the Belarusians to step back from confrontation with the US and that Latvia was also encouraging an EU presidency press statement on the issue. Latvian PolDir Peteris Ustubs called later to say that the statement would not be going forward, claiming that "the Slovenes listened to the French who thought a statement was too much."

14. (S/NF) Skuja concluded the discussion by noting that Latvian intelligence agencies had been receiving interesting reporting on Belarus of late and that he would encourage them to share their information with appropriate counterparts in the Embassy. Pol/econ chief welcomed the initiative.  
LARSON